

Upper Platte Basin-Wide Plan Annual Meeting

Meeting Minutes

Tri-Basin NRD Office
1723 Burlington St, Holdrege, NE 68949
Meeting also conducted remotely via Zoom Conference
August 7, 2025, @ 1:00 p.m. (CT)

1) Introductions

Attendance:

John Thorburn (TBNRD)	Scott Schaneman (NPNRD)	Galen Wittrock (SPNRD)
Kent Miller (TPNRD)	Lyndon Vogt (CPNRD)	Jennifer Schellpeper (DWEE)
Travis Preston (NPNRD)	Ryan Reisdorff (NPNRD)	Jesse Mintken (CPNRD)
Jeff Shafer (NPPD)	Ryan Reuter (NPNRD Director)	Thad Kuntz (ARI)
Larry Reynolds (TBNRD Director)	Nolan Little (TBNRD)	Mike Drain (CNPPID)
Devin Brundage (CNPPID)	Dean Edson (NARD)	Ryan Kelly (DWEE)
Judy Eggleston (Southside ID)	Erica Gnuse (Ducks Unlimited)	Mike Archer (NGPC)
Keith Koupal (NGPC)	Dustin Wilcox (NARD)	Joselyn Luedtke (Zulkoski Weber)
Kari Burgert (DWEE)		

*Shaded areas indicate online attendees

2) Review Agenda & Meeting Procedures

The group reviewed and did not make any modifications to the agenda.

3) Meeting Minutes to Accept: August 1, 2024

Scott Schaneman motioned to approve the minutes as presented.

Lyndon Vogt seconded the motion.

The 2024 meeting minutes were unanimously approved without additional discussion.

4) Monitoring & Management Actions

a. Department Report

Caitlin Kingsley (DWEE) presented the Department's report on 2024 activities and informed the attendees that effective July 1st, the Department of Natural Resources (NeDNR) merged with the Department of Environment and Energy (NDEE) to form the new Department of Water, Energy, and Environment (DWEE). This consolidated agency now encompasses divisions such as water planning (including quality planning and integrated management planning), surface water, groundwater registrations, water administration, dam safety, air quality, land, waste, permitting, and livestock.

Caitlin provided an update on the basin-wide planning timeline, stating that the

Upper Platte Basin-Wide Plan Annual Meeting

Meeting Minutes

basin is in the second increment between Robust Reviews. The Department is in the process of finalizing the 2023 Robust Review documentation and has begun planning for the 2027 Robust Review, which will inform the next increment set to begin in 2029.

Regarding 2024 permitted activities, the Department approved 20 new temporary surface water permits for excess flow recharge. All temporary permits expire one year after issuance, and their collective impact resulted in no new net depletions to the basin. The Department also completed an analysis of transfer permits issued by each NRD during the reporting year, which showed a net positive impact (accretions) from 2025 forward across all NRDs, excluding the NPNRD's groundwater-only to comingled transfer. On behalf of NPNRD, ARI conducted an analysis of the NRD's only transfer. The analysis estimated there would be net depletions for the first two years, followed by net accretions for the remainder of the projection period.

Caitlin confirmed that the 2023 Robust Review Report is nearing completion. She explained that this review evaluates pre- and post-July 1, 1997, development, assesses progress towards planned goals, and provides a 50-year estimate of streamflow depletions and accretions resulting from management actions. Ryan Kelly (DWEE) stated that the Robust Review's results are accessible on the legacy dnr.nebraska.gov website, with a new DWEE website to host this information. Ryan added that contractor documentation for the Robust Review is currently in-house for review. DWEE is developing a new website, like upperplattejointplanning.com, to host all Robust Review material for public use.

Caitlin also presented updates on recent and ongoing projects. The Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) declared an allocation on the North Platte River earlier this season because the total system supply remained below 1.1 million acre-feet throughout June and July. The Decision Support System (DSS) utilized by DWEE for tracking excess flows, assists in notifying appropriators when water is available for diversion. Active excess flow permits are held by the Western Canal on the South Platte River, several canals on the North Platte River above Lake McConaughy, and canals below Lake McConaughy on the North Platte and Platte Rivers. Since the last basin-wide meeting on August 1, 2024, three excess flow events occurred, involving the Tri-County Canal, Keith-Lincoln, and North Platte canals for pit recharge. Finally, Caitlin shared a new dashboard for real-time monitoring and management of streamflow augmentation below the Twin Platte NRD pipeline.

b. NRD Reports

i. CPNRD

Upper Platte Basin-Wide Plan Annual Meeting

Meeting Minutes

Jesse Mintken (CPNRD) reported that CPNRD concluded 2024 with 1,012,805 certified acres, comprising 936,059 acres of groundwater irrigated land and 76,746 acres of commingled land. From January 1 to December 31, 2024, CPNRD approved 102 groundwater transfers, resulting in 906 new groundwater irrigated acres offset by 770 acres. The NRD also issued 94 well permits, including 14 supplemental groundwater, 76 replacement, two new, and one industrial well permit.

ii. NPNRD

Scott Schaneman (NPNRD) reported no new acres certified for January 1 through December 31, 2024. One groundwater-only to commingled transfer was approved. NPNRD also approved two variances: one for the aforementioned transfer due to an URF zone splitting properties, and another for an allocation exemption on groundwater acres, requiring 9.7% of certified acres to be set aside as an offset. The NRD issued nine well permits, including one new for wildlife certification and the rest for replacement irrigation wells. Flow meter data showed 150,777 acre-feet pumped from 171,499.4 certified acres, averaging 10.6 acre-inches per acre. NPNRD programs hold 2,698 acres in retirement, broken down as 392.5 commingled, 312.3 surface water-only, and 1,993.2 groundwater acres. All reporting municipalities and industries remained below their baselines. Through its water conservation programs, NPNRD paid out \$105,730.69 for irrigation efficiency improvements.

iii. SPNRD

Ryan Reisdorff (SPNRD) stated that for 2024, SPNRD had 131,483 total certified irrigated acres, with approximately 51,346 in the overappropriated area and 80,121 in the fully appropriated area. The NRD's board approved six transfers: one industrial transfer offset new industrial use with an irrigation allocation, two allocation transfers moved allocations between fields, and three transfers involved new pivots on flood acres, with no new consumptive use anticipated. The NRD issued four replacement well permits (three irrigation, one industrial) and one variance for an industrial transfer across sub-area boundaries from the overappropriated to the fully appropriated area. SPNRD manages two industrial accounting scenarios: 13 non-baseline certifications had offsets from irrigated acres and allocation, and 19 active industries with baselines pumped almost 345 million gallons of water. Ten monitored municipalities pumped just over one billion gallons. Flow meter data indicated 118,641 acre-feet pumped from 131,483 certified acres,

Upper Platte Basin-Wide Plan Annual Meeting

Meeting Minutes

averaging 11.16 inches per acre. SPNRD reported no irrigated acre retirements or excess flow diversions in 2024. Five of the ten municipalities have conservation plans, attached to their report. Western Canal is the only irrigation district in SPNRD permitted to take excess flows.

iv. TBNRD

Nolan Little (TBNRD) reported that the Platte Basin portion of TBNRD has 299,056.74 certified irrigated acres, with 116,488.22 commingled and the remaining acres using groundwater. TBNRD certified 20,715 acres of surface water irrigated land for groundwater use in irrigation, allowing for supplemental wells if needed, provided surface irrigation rights are maintained for the well's life. The NRD completed several acre transfers, mostly one-for-one, with one adjusted for depletion impact (20 acres dried up to produce 6.5 acres at a new location). Nolan stated that the district did not issue groundwater transfers for 2024. Eight well permits were issued: six true replacements and two conditional replacements (supplemental with surface water). No acre correction variances were reported. Regarding the Water Conservation Incentive Program, there were no applications for the groundwater option in the Platte Basin in 2024, but commingled applications totaled 3,621 acres. Nolan stated that TBNRD works with CNPPID, DWEE, and CPNRD to divert excess flows to federal wetlands and Elwood Reservoir. Improvements to delivery systems for these wetlands have been completed with the Rainwater Basin Joint Venture. The Platte River Recovery Implementation Program (PRRIP) also diverted excess flows within the district, primarily for the Cottonwood Ranch augmentation property. TBNRD operates eight augmentation wells on or adjacent to the Cottonwood property for PRRIP, which operated for an average of 112 days in 2024, producing 2,440 acre-feet. TBNRD's two augmentation wells on North Dry Creek did not operate last year.

v. TPNRD

Kent Miller (TPNRD) reported that in 2024, TPNRD had 316,280 certified irrigated acres, with approximately 45,000 of those being commingled. The district approved 10 transfers involving 168.81 acres, which resulted in net accretions from 2025 forward. TPNRD issued 14 replacement well permits and four new well permits for calendar year 2024, along with two industrial well permits. The temporary non-irrigated program, which began in 2017, saw 26 landowners participate in the short-term program (1,777 acres) and seven landowners in the long-term program (168 acres). TPNRD continues its

Upper Platte Basin-Wide Plan Annual Meeting

Meeting Minutes

participation in the NCORPE project and operates the North Pipeline during shortages of protected flow. The district's groundwater management plan update is nearing completion, with finalization expected in 2025.

c. Data, Information, Studies

i. Annual Review of Progress Toward Increment Goals

Caitlin reported that the annual review of progress toward increment goals, including the analysis of 2024 NRD permitted transfers and the net impact analysis with ARI's North Platte NRD transfer, was covered during the Department Report. She confirmed that this information is comprehensively included in the Department's depletions/accretion report, with copies available at the meeting.

ii. 2023 Robust Review Report

Ryan Kelly provided an update on the 2023 Robust Review report. He stated that the documentation from contractors for both the Western Water Use and COHYST areas is Under review by the Department. Ryan announced that a new website is under development to replace the existing HTML site, designed to be very similar in appearance to the <https://upjointplanning.nebraska.gov/> site. This new platform will feature a dedicated "Robust Review 2023" button, providing public access to all relevant materials, including documentation for the entire Robust Review. DWEE intends to proactively reach out to obtain any necessary data documentation not currently in its possession to ensure comprehensive public availability. The goal is to finalize this Robust Review and transition focus to the next iteration. Ryan clarified that while the existing upjointplanning.nebraska.gov site is live and hosts materials up to the 2019 Robust Review, the new website will supersede it.

iii. Upper Platte River Drought Contingency Plan Update

Caitlin recounted that the Department submitted the initial draft plan to the Bureau of Reclamation (Bureau) in August 2024, following the previous year's basin-wide meeting. The Bureau provided feedback in November 2024, outlining four main items for the Department to address: clarifying drought monitoring protocols and responsibilities, prioritizing mitigation actions, clarifying response actions in terms of priority and timing, and clarifying overall plan implementation responsibilities. The timeline for the plan's completion was extended due to the Bureau's longer than anticipated review

Upper Platte Basin-Wide Plan Annual Meeting

Meeting Minutes

period, pushing the WaterSMART grant term to the end of 2025. In response to the Bureau's feedback, the Department developed several goals for revising the plan. The goals include addressing the Bureau's comments to meet WaterSMART requirements, reorganizing the plan for better functionality, clearly distinguishing between basin-wide and NRD activities, simplifying and clarifying drought monitoring protocols while incorporating surface water supply differences, prioritizing mitigation and response actions, and solidifying the communication plan. To improve functionality, the plan will compile all action items into one centralized executive summary of plan implementation activities. Caitlin clarified that the Basin-Wide Plan (BWP) serves as an overarching document, and the basin-wide drought plan aims to meet the BWP's objectives. Primary basin-wide activities will focus on drought monitoring and communication, with mitigation and response project implementation occurring at the NRD level. The monitoring plan language has been updated, changing "watch and warning" to "advisory and alert". The plan simplified drought triggers and introduced water supply sub-areas with associated triggers. Clearly defined monitoring items serve as supplemental data rather than direct triggers. Surface water supply sub-areas include the North Platte River above Lake McConaughy, the South Platte River to the confluence, and the Platte River downstream of Lake McConaughy to the Loop River confluence. The updated drought triggers for the basin-wide area and each sub-area utilize the US Drought Monitor for seasonal indications and the Evaporative Demand Drought Index (one-month aggregation) for short-term indications. Water supply sub-area triggers specify conditions such as forecasted North Platte supply, mean daily discharge at Julesburg on the South Platte River, and Lake McConaughy storage level. Supplemental indicators include snowpack, streamgages, groundwater levels, precipitation indices, grassland productivity forecast (Grass-Cast), and temperature and precipitation outlooks. Mitigation and response actions have been revised, reframed, and recategorized to ensure they are within the authority of the Department and NRDs to implement. The Department refined actions into mitigation or response categories. Prioritization criteria were developed and applied, tying response actions to specific triggers and identifying primary implementation responsibilities. The top priority actions are those that help NRDs and the Department fulfill statutory responsibilities, followed by actions that build upon existing partnerships, and lastly those requiring new partnerships. Recategorized actions include water supply, drought-resilient agriculture, drought-resilient habitat, domestic water use, and outreach. The communication plan has

Upper Platte Basin-Wide Plan Annual Meeting

Meeting Minutes

also been updated to include a solidified basin-wide communication framework, a public outreach process, opportunities for stakeholder engagement, and emergency response communication. Basin-wide communication will involve the POAC bimonthly meetings to review conditions and determine communication needs, and the development of an automated, public-facing drought dashboard. Stakeholder engagement will incorporate Condition Monitoring Observer Reports (CMOR), which allow the public to submit evidence of drought conditions that can support the US Drought Monitor development, as demonstrated by a case in Missouri where such reports influenced drought designations for federal funds. The public outreach process involves a stepwise approach to assess triggers, determine impacts, identify audiences and partners, and then craft and publish tailored messages. Jennifer Schellpeper (DWEE) clarified that the "we" in this process refers to a joint communication effort that can be personalized to each NRD's stakeholder base, with trigger assessment likely beginning in PBC meetings. Next steps for the plan include finalizing edits through September 2025, submitting the plan for a secondary BOR review by October 1, 2025, and aiming for plan completion by the end of 2025.

d. Project Updates

No additional project updates were provided.

5) Review of Revisions to the Basin-Wide Plan or to Individual IMPs or Disputes

Jennifer provided an update on IMP revisions being considered in response to the most recent Robust Review results, with handouts outlining planned changes to the IMPs. The proposed updates address areas such as accomplishments, triggers, and goals, which are adjusted based on the Robust Review findings. Additionally, the revisions incorporate updates to conservation measures, a topic previously discussed by the POAC Technical Committee. A significant change relates to the goals and objectives for Central Platte NRD and Twin Platte NRD, as the 2023 Robust Review results indicate these districts have reached the 1997 level; thus, their new objective will be to maintain this level and prevent negative impacts relative to the 1997 baseline. Revisions account for the Neb. Rev. Stat. § 46-740 change which impacts reporting procedures and the management of industrial uses with allocations throughout the basin. Sam Capps (DWEE) emphasized that this is draft language intended for discussion, and the DWEE will engage each NRD individually regarding their specific IMPs. While the process to develop full drafts will take time, there will be at least one stakeholder information meeting and subsequent hearings before the IMPs can be officially updated. Sam clarified that this update represents an interim step to

Upper Platte Basin-Wide Plan Annual Meeting

Meeting Minutes

conclude the current increment, rather than a plan for the third increment, which would require further stakeholder engagement.

6) Written Requests for Revisions to the Basin-Wide Plan or to Individual IMPs or Disputes

John Thorburn (TBNRD) stated that the POAC received a request by Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District (CNPPID) and the Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD) for the alteration of the BWP. POAC intends to provide a written response within approximately 90 days. When invited to offer further comments or additional information, the irrigation district representatives had no further comment.

7) Public Comment Period

No public comment was provided.

8) Meeting Summary

a. Action Items

Reports and datasets should be finalized within two weeks of this meeting so the Department may begin work on the Nebraska New Depletions Plan annual report.

b. Schedule Next Annual Meeting

The group tentatively agreed to August 6, 2026, hosted by TPNRD.

Meeting adjourned at 2:05 p.m. CT.